

# Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

## Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools Program marks successful first year with national award

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — The Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools (KGHS) Program is celebrating its first year anniversary with a national award and a total enrollment of 58 public and private schools. The innovative voluntary program encourages students to identify and initiate healthy and environmentally sound practices at their schools.

KGHS, sponsored by the Kentucky Environmental Education Council (KEEC) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), is one of six national programs that will be awarded the inaugural Excellence in Green Building Curriculum Recognition Awards from the U.S. Green Building Council. The award recognizes innovative green building design, construction and operation from pre-kindergarten through college. KGHS is the only program in Kentucky to receive the award.

“The first year of the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools Program has exceeded all of our expectations in terms of the number of schools involved and the national recognition it has garnered. We want to continue to build on that success and encourage more schools to join the effort,” said Maria Zoretic, KGHS program coordinator.

Kentucky is one of about five states that have started a program to make school environments more healthy and energy efficient. “Kentucky is one of the first states to combine making existing schools and new schools greener and healthier,” said Zoretic.

The term greener refers to efforts to make environmentally friendly decisions such as recycling and conserving energy.

Zoretic said she was “blown away” by the response of schools in Kentucky the first year because previous states that have started a similar program have gotten six to eight schools in the first year compared to 58 schools in Kentucky. Zoretic said her goal is to add at least 25 more schools in the next year, increase outreach to schools and make teachers more aware of the resources that are available such as grants and activities in classrooms. She said she wants to communicate more with KGHS through the Web site, electronic monthly reminders, discussion boards and follow up calls.

“Now that we have these schools on board I want to make sure that they have the resources and support they need for the program to be successful within their schools,” Zoretic said.

Staff and students in the program conduct environmental and health inventories of their schools in nine areas: energy, indoor air quality, green spaces, hazardous chemicals, water, health and nutrition, transportation, solid waste, and instructional leadership (conducted by the faculty). Each inventory contains questions that are aligned to Kentucky’s core content at each grade level.

The plans can potentially save money and energy as well as improve the schools’ environment and the health of students and staff. Some of the school improvement projects this year include starting a recycling program, creating a rain garden, implementing the EPA indoor air quality tools for schools kit, starting a nutrition and exercise newsletter, composting, writing an energy policy and organizing an educational environmental fair.

“This is a unique Web-based, student-centered education program that gives students the opportunity to learn about and improve their own health and the sustainability of their environment. It teaches them leadership skills, problem-solving techniques and gives them the tools they need to make their schools better,” said Zoretic.

Nakia Brown, a sixth grade science and language arts teacher and the coordinator of the KGHS program at Wingo Elementary School in Graves County, said about 450 students have been involved in the school project and she would recommend it to other schools.

“Our school has become more aware of the impact we make on our environment. We are teaching our students to become more conscious of their choices and the choices we make as a whole. Our goal is to become a more sustainable, environmentally friendly school.

“We have learned not to take our resources for granted. Our students are realizing that each person has a responsibility to make a difference in our community as well as globally,” Brown said.

Wingo implemented plans to reduce solid waste, educate its teachers about environmental issues and reduce energy usage in the school, she said.

Schools in the program can attain various levels of recognition by submitting and completing improvement projects. If a school completes nine inventories and nine projects, they may become a model school and mentor other schools.

Tresine Logsdon, a biology teacher at Henry Clay High School in Lexington, said about 110 students participated in the KGHS program last year. Some of their projects included landscaping the school campus, implementing some energy reduction measures and improving recycling efforts. She said that because of the visibility of the projects have raised awareness of environmental issues among the students and faculty.

“We have found that as we gain momentum in this program and gear up for more improvement projects, students want to know more about the KGHS program they've heard so much about and they want to be a part of it.

“We learned a great deal about our school environment by completing the audits. Because students had to dig deep and use multiple sources to find answers to their questions, they became more invested in the process and ways to improve our school in that area,” Logsdon said.

Both the KEEC and the KDE agencies are in the Kentucky Education Cabinet. State Farm Insurance and Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc. are private corporate sponsors for KGHS.

The KGHS program was designed with the help of a task force of state employees from the environmental, education and business communities. For more information about KGHS, visit <http://www.greenschools.ky.gov> or call 1-800-882-5271.